

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2003

January 8, 2010

Mr. Stephen R. Leeds
Acting Administrator
United States General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Administrator Leeds:

I want you to be aware of the unmitigated disaster caused by the General Services Administration (GSA) in rolling out your proposal for a Foreign Affairs Security Training Center in Queen Anne's County Maryland.

The State Department plans to consolidate its nineteen separate diplomatic security training facilities into a single facility. This consolidation is needed to improve the safety of American diplomats – who are facing increasing risks around the world – and to save taxpayer dollars. The GSA and State Department selected a site in Queen Anne's County Maryland as the preferred location for this facility.

Apparently, the selection of the location did not take into account the fact that citizens of the local community must be fully involved in any decision to build or expand federal facilities. My constituents have a right to know, and a right to be heard. Instead of reaching out to the community, GSA has treated them with a disregard that borders on arrogance. At public outreach meetings held this week, GSA representatives were completely unprepared to answer fundamental, legitimate questions pertaining to the community's concerns about the facility. They displayed a shocking, inexcusable and inexplicable lack of preparation, which has resulted in threats of lawsuits, widespread anger and what I fear is now an implacable opposition to the project.

For example, GSA was completely unprepared to answer basic questions about the timeline and next steps for acquiring land on which the facility would be built. This conveyed a lack of transparency into the process that is completely unacceptable. GSA also inexplicably moved the second meeting from the auditorium where it was advertised to a smaller cafeteria, leading to a severe shortage in space that deprived my constituents of their rights to have their concerns addressed.

GSA briefers at both meetings were also unable to explain in clear terms the environmental impact assessment process, how community input would be taken into account, and what steps would be taken to mitigate impacts and comply with local open-space restrictions.

It is hard to imagine how your team could have done a worse job in explaining this important project to the community. And while their support might not have been a given even with superb preparation, what might have been viewed as a tremendous economic boost to the

Eastern Shore of Maryland is now perceived as a threat to the community's safety and well being.

This disastrous lack of preparation and dismissive attitude represents an unconscionable lack of respect for our democratic process.

I now want the GSA to:

1. Extend the public comment period.
2. Bring in competent briefers who are able to fully and knowledgeably answer questions and who will treat the community with the respect they deserve.
3. Make arrangements for adjacent property owners to tour a similar federal facility – either the Department of Homeland Security's training facility at Cheltenham or the Secret Service's training facility in Beltsville, Maryland.

I want you to take charge of this important matter. I look forward to hearing from you directly by Monday morning.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator

cc: Governor Martin O'Malley